

# **A Space for Us – Exploring how newly arrived young women experience gender specific youth programs.**

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## Abstract

This qualitative research used feminist and phenomenological methods to explore how newly arrived young women (NAYW) aged 19 – 21 years, experience young women's programs they participated in. Understanding young women's experiences is important because little academic literature exists about this. With significant numbers of young women settling in Melbourne over the last seven years it is important to ensure that settlement services and youth programs are aware of the specific needs of this group. This awareness can help to ensure that young women experience positive settlement outcomes and have every opportunity to achieve their full life potential.

This research contributes to an environment in which little academic evidence exists about the needs of NAYW as they settle in Australia. The literature review found evidence to support the development of gender specific groups: as a violence prevention strategy; to deliver culturally appropriate sexual health information, and; as a more culturally appropriate intervention for Muslim women. This showed that there are benefits of women's programs, however no published data specifically addressed how and why gender specific programs are useful for NAYW as they experience settlement.

Through participation in this research this thesis gave voice to five NAYW to help inform services targeting young people to consider the specific needs and experiences of this group. It explored their experiences of gender issues and gender specific programs and how this impacted on their settlement experience.

This research found that gender specific programs are a culturally appropriate and a beneficial intervention that can aid the settlement process for NAYW. It uncovered that gender is a significant factor influencing young women's lives and how they interact with others.

This research also confirmed the existing literature that acknowledges that families are important to NAYW. It highlighted that when services engage with families this can help facilitate better access to programs. The gender specific nature of young women's programs can also increase the likelihood of NAYW's engagement with services. This thesis provides some recommendation that services, policy makers and academics can use to enhance the settlement experience for NAYW.

## **Declaration**

*This is to certify that:*

*The thesis comprises only my original work towards the Master of Adolescent Health and Welfare. Due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used. The thesis is (insert the number) words in length, exclusive of tables, bibliographies and appendices.*

**Candidate Signature:**

**Maureen Rodgers**

**Date: 22.11.2013**

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## **Dedication**

For Mum, who was once a newly arrived young women and who taught me that education is a pathway to a better life. I miss her.

## Acronyms

Centre for Multicultural Youth

CMY

Department of Immigration and Citizenship

DIAC

Newly Arrived Young Women

NAYW

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## 1. Introduction and Statement of Problem

This thesis explores how newly arrived young women (NAYW) aged 19 – 25 years' experience gender specific programs and how these programs can improve the settlement process. Understanding experiences of NAYW is fundamental to ensure that services are well targeted and that young women who come to Australia have every opportunity to reach their full potential.

Qualitative feminist and phenomenological research methods have been used to capture young women's experiences through in depth semi-structured interviews. Information from the interviews is presented and then combined with existing literature to illuminate how and why gender specific programs enhance the settlement experience of NAYW.

In 2012 the Centre for Multicultural Youth (CMY) led a program for NAYW called *Girls' Space*, in Melbourne's South East. Evaluation of this program revealed that research about the needs of NAYW in Australia is limited (Turnbull 2012).

The lack of understanding about NAYW's needs impacts on the level of funding available for programs for these young women. Letherby & Bywaters (2007) argue that it's accepted that social science knowledge (as can be generated from this kind of research) can be used to transform social policy and political systems. Documenting young women's experiences is important to ensure that policy responses and funding are available to adequately meet their needs.

A report documenting the levels of philanthropic funding to women's and girls' initiatives in Australia found that most grants fund programs for both sexes and that the specific needs of women can be overlooked (McDonald & Scaife 2011). "Women... lack power, visibility or opportunity to voice their needs and opinions. As a result, mainstream projects can be less

effective than they might otherwise be and philanthropic impact is lessened” (Keady, in McDonald & Scaife 2011, p.3). More evidence and stronger rationale is needed to encourage more funding for women’s and girls’ programs (McDonald & Scaife 2011).

The silencing of young women’s voices may be particularly acute for newly-arrived or culturally diverse women. This thesis is a step towards hearing the voices of NAYW and providing evidence to encourage more funding for young women’s programs.

This thesis will conclude with discussion about why and how gender specific programs aid the settlement process for NAYW, followed by recommendations for services, policy makers and academics.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Newly Arrived Young People in Metropolitan Melbourne

Statistical data from the former Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) (now called Department of Immigration and Border Protection) indicates that in the last seven years 44,407 young women and 42,553 young men aged between 18 – 25 years arrived from overseas to settle in Melbourne (DIAC 2013). The largest numbers of young women have settled in Melbourne (4,242), Greater Dandenong (3018), Monash (3178), Wyndham (3338), Casey (2704) and Whitehorse (2332) (Ibid.). Table one below shows the countries of origin.

Table One – Main countries of origin for women aged 18 – 25 years who have settled in Melbourne in the last seven years. These figures represent people granted permanent visa status, settling under the Family, Humanitarian and Skilled Migration Streams.

County of origin	Number
China	10462
India	9109
Vietnam	2593
Malaysia	2321
Indonesia	1745
Sri Lanka	1405
Philippines	809
Hong Kong	807
Afghanistan	775
Pakistan	745
United Kingdom	727
Lebanon	697
Cambodia	651
Iraq	627

(DIAC 2013)

This data indicates that Melbourne has significant numbers of NAYW settling from a diverse range of countries, but does not include people arriving on temporary visas such as student

and temporary protection visas. This means that the actual number of NAYW living in Melbourne is higher than has been reported here. Figures for people arriving on temporary visas have been more difficult to locate and are not provided.

For the purpose of this thesis “newly arrived” young people will be inclusive of refugee, asylum seeker and migrant background people who have been in Australia for seven years or less (regardless of visa type or status). NAYW are not a homogenous group; however it is likely that they share some commonalities because they are all settling in a new country and they are all female.

## 2.2 Newly Arrived Young People and Settlement

To analyse whether gender-specific programs aid NAYW’s settlement, it’s important to consider the settlement process. While there are different frameworks for considering settlement such as *assimilation* (where people need to be subsumed into the mainstream) or *differential exclusionist* (where people are included in some areas but excluded from the mainstream), Francis and Cornfoot (2007) advocate for a *pluralist* approach to settlement, where diversity is recognised and equal participation is encouraged.

In 2006, the Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues (CMYI) (now called Centre for Multicultural Youth) produced a report exploring good settlement for refugee young people in Australia (O’Sullivan & Ollif 2006). Although the report focuses on refugee young people, the model can apply to migrants and other settlers. The authors acknowledge that there are many different frameworks for understanding what it means to be well settled in Australia (Ibid.). After extensive consultation with key stakeholders they indicated that young people need the following things to feel settled:

- Material Conditions – housing, health care;
- Occupational needs – income, education, training, employment pathways;
- Environmental factors – safety, no discrimination, access entitlements;
- Wellbeing and connectedness – hope for future, support networks, feeling valued, positive identity, social opportunities that are accessible, family connection, physical and emotional wellbeing, trust in others; and
- Agency – capacity to shape future, pathways and goals, understand cultural norms, transition from dependence to interdependence, confidence to access services and supports.

(O’Sullivan & Ollif 2006, p. 16)

While most settlers face the challenge of learning a new language and new cultural and societal norms, young people face additional challenges because they are also trying to negotiate “family, peer, individual and community expectations within the context of adolescence.” (O’Sullivan & Ollif 2006 p. 8).

To aid the settlement process it is important for newly arrived young people to develop social connections with other people both within and outside of their own cultures (O’Sullivan and Ollif 2006). This connection can be provided in gender specific groups. Youth groups focused on the needs of newly arrived young people, and particularly gender and ethno-specific groups, help to facilitate social connection (O’Sullivan & Ollif 2006).

Unfortunately there has been little attention to gender within the existing settlement literature about the specific needs of refugee and other NAYW (Paxton, Smith, Win Mulholland & Hood 2011; Gifford, Correa-Velez & Sampson 2009; Giddens 2003; Francis & Cornfoot 2007 and O’Sullivan & Olliff 2006).

## **2.3 Challenges Faced by Newly Arrived Young People**

Before arriving in Australia many newly arrived young people from refugee backgrounds have experienced violence, poverty, life in refugee camps, being moved around frequently, and extended stays in transit countries, all of which affect their ability to settle well in a new country (Francis & Cornfoot 2007).

When arriving in Australia newly arrived young people face many challenges including accessing education and information, and structural discrimination. Young people of a “refugee like” background (people may not have a refugee visa but have shared the common experiences of refugees e.g. fleeing, trauma, living in transition countries) are more likely to be living in: a single parent household, flat or apartment; be without access to a car; have a parent with limited education and are more likely to live in poverty (Paxton et al 2011).

It’s important to acknowledge that in the face of adversity young people from refugee backgrounds have personal strengths and resilience that enables them to achieve despite facing great challenges (Gifford, Correa-Velez & Sampson 2009).

## **2.4 Literature Relating to Newly Arrived Young Women and Group Work**

From the limited literature available it is clear that NAYW benefit from gender specific programs. Once in Australia, group work is beneficial and therapeutic for multicultural young people. A report about the settlement needs of multicultural young people highlighted that fun activities within the youth sector can build “relationships and gain... trust, while having positive outcomes on self-esteem, confidence, language skills and friendships” (Francis & Cornfoot 2007, p.33).

A recent report about the settlement needs of refugee women highlighted that small groups are considered a part of good practice to address the settlement needs of refugee women (DIAC 2013). This was the only report found that discussed the settlement needs of refugee women specifically and was not specific to young people. Other reports that highlight the benefit of gender specific group work for migrant or refugee women is in the context of violence prevention or sexual health or relating specifically to Muslim women.

For example, a report that explored primary prevention initiatives to address violence experienced by newly arrived women highlighted that newly arrived women are particularly vulnerable to violence and less likely to report it (Poljski 2011). The author documented that youth leadership programs are a useful violence prevention strategy:

These programs appear to be valuable to the settlement process, facilitating social inclusion for participants. However, mixed gender leadership programs need to either ensure each gender has equal opportunities to participate and express their views and/or include gender specific components so that young women and men can discuss gendered issues separately and freely. Gender-specific leadership programs would also be beneficial. (Poljski 2011, p. 41)

In 2009, the Centre for Ethnicity and Health completed an evaluation of their Sister2Sister sexual health program developed for refugee and migrant young women. They found that NAYW had limited awareness of sexual and reproductive health, which could result in unplanned pregnancies (Malunga 2009). Having found that culturally diverse young women face cultural barriers to accessing accurate information, they developed a gender specific program that was useful in meeting the needs of their young participants (Ibid.).

## 2.5 Literature Related to Muslim Newly Arrived Young Women

Findings from the Sister2Sister report are consistent with the 2011 Refugee Status Report that identified that recently arrived refugee young people need improved sexual health knowledge (Paxton et al 2011). This report also suggested that gender specific programs would be most appropriate for delivering sensitive information to refugee young people (Ibid.). They suggest that groups should be delivered by same gendered facilitators as they would be met with greater acceptance, particularly for Muslim young women (Ibid.).

This gendered approach is advocated for in another report on the needs of Muslim families (Pe-Pua, Gendera, Katz & O'Connor 2010). The authors found that Muslim young people felt they needed youth friendly places where they can engage in sports and other activities (Pe-Pua, Gendera, Katz & O'Connor 2010).

Young women preferred women-only sports activities...(T)here were just a few days when public pools were open to females only... They could also do with out-of-school activities/programs allowing for more women-only activities where possible. (Pe-Pua, Gendera, Katz & O'Connor 2010 pp. 69-70).

## 2.6 Newly Arrived Young Women's Experiences of Young Women's Programs

The author was not able to find any peer reviewed research specifically focused on the value of gender specific programs for NAYW, however, existing program evaluations are available.

In 2012, the CMY *Girls Space* program was externally evaluated (Turnbull 2012). This was a 12 week leadership and wellbeing program for young women aged 17 – 25 who had lived in Australia for less than seven years. Positive feedback about the program was received from all involved (Ibid.). Outcomes included being better informed about life in Australia,



developing connections with other young women, experiencing new activities and being linked into other opportunities (Ibid.). The program was found to be successful in terms of meeting its objectives (Ibid.).

Similarly, a longitudinal evaluation report for a program called *Lead On Again* documented the outcomes of a leadership program for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) women aged 16-24 (Blustein 2013). This program runs over a full week and covers topics such as leadership, event management, public speaking, healthy relationships, stress management, yoga and more. The report indicated that the program has a significant positive impact on young women's confidence, knowledge, skills, sense of self and civic participation (Ibid.). The evaluation suggests that the program fills a gap because traditional leadership programs in education settings and other services are not readily accessed by CALD young women (Ibid.).

These programs suggest that gender-specific programs provide positive experiences for NAYW. Young women in both of these programs made connections, learned new skills and developed confidence. These positive outcomes are consistent with factors that aid the settlement process. This research will build on this knowledge to gain further insight into why these programs may be beneficial.

## **2.7 Literature Review Findings**

There are significant numbers of newly arrived young people settling in Melbourne. Young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds face challenges additional to the normal challenges of adolescence. Challenges include settling in a new country, learning a new language, facing adverse socio-environmental challenges, learning new social structures,

navigating complicated dual cultural expectations from their family and community and in the case of many young refugees dealing with past trauma.

NAYW in particular face challenges that are specific to them. These young women need to navigate pressures to conform to gender roles from two cultures. Young women are more likely to experience issues of gender based violence (Poljski 2011) and need to receive information in culturally sensitive ways (with respect to gender, culture and religion) which are not always demonstrated in Australia.

Several of the reviewed reports recommended various gender specific programs to appropriately address the needs of NAYW. These reports were in the context of exploring violence prevention, sexual health information for young people, meeting the needs of Muslim families and a report reviewing the status of refugees. The researcher was not able to find any research specifically about the need for gender specific programs for NAYW. However, the reports did indicate that gender specific programs are an appropriate intervention for newly arrived young women. This was supported by the two young women's program evaluations cited in this section that highlighted the positive impact of young women's programs for NAYW.

### 3. Theoretical Framework

Feminist theory provides an influential theoretical framework for this research. Feminist research aims to give women a voice and “correct the male oriented perspective that has predominated in the development of social sciences” (Neuman 1991, p. 80). The feminist idea of giving women a platform to have their voices heard fits well with this project. The literature review found that very little data exists about the need for gender specific youth programs for young women. Certainly no research was identified that was written by young women.

The feminist framework also fits with this research because of the researcher’s professional background. She has worked with NAYW at CMY for over four years. Her experience has shaped her understanding of issues facing young women and contributed to her motivation for wanting to undertake this research. Feminism allows for this because “feminist researchers are not objective or detached; they interact and collaborate with the people they study” (Neuman 1991, p.81).

Consistent with feminist theory, this research will use a qualitative framework. While quantitative methods of research involve counting how much or how often a phenomenon occurs, qualitative methods elicit more descriptive information about the topic (Wadsworth 1984). “Qualitative research allows a substantive area to be studied in great depth..., and is more likely to give the researcher an appreciation of the experiences, attitudes, and beliefs of the subjects of the research” (Jureidini, Kenny and Pool 1997, p. 158).

Another theory influencing this research is phenomenology, where social reality is understood through people’s consciousness (Liamputtong 2010). Phenomenological studies

are interested in people's lived experiences in relation to concepts or areas of interest (Liamputtong 2010). For this study it means understanding young women's experiences in their own words and how they perceive the importance of gender specific programs for NAYW.

“Phenomenological studies often employ in-depth interviews as a means to generate detailed descriptions of reality” (Liamputong 2010, p. 5). It's common for feminist researchers to adopt phenomenological interviewing in their studies (Reinharz 1992); utilising interviews for this research fits both with its feminist and phenomenological frameworks.

This research provides rich and detailed description of young women's experiences to enable the reader to better understand young women's experiences of gender specific programs. It's important in phenomenological research that the readers can empathise with the subject of study. The reader should be able to ‘vicariously experience’ the phenomenon under study and therefore draw the same conclusions as the research participants about the subject (Starks and Trinidad 2007).

Phenomenological research illuminates “taken for granted” knowledge and highlights taken for granted assumptions about a subject (Starks & Trinidad 2007). This approach fits with this subject because one would expect that young women's programs have a positive impact, however this is not extensively documented in relation to NAYW.

## 4. Method

### 4.1 Information about the Sample

A purposive sampling technique was utilized for this research, where participants (who represent information rich cases) were selected because of their specific experience in relation to the research question (Liamputting 2010). They met the following criteria;

- Female,
- Aged 18-25 years old,
- Have been in Australia for the last 7 years,
- Have at least a basic level of spoken English and
- Have participated in a gender specific program since arriving in Australia.

For the *Girls' Space* program, CMY recruited NAYW who had lived in Australia for up to seven years. Since this research will contribute to information to inform the work of CMY and the *Girls Space* program, it will keep its target consistent with the organisation. However the researcher acknowledges that definitions of newly arrived people can vary between 5 to 10 years (CMY 2012).

For the purposes of this research gender specific youth programs are defined as programs for young women that target young women specifically.

### 4.2 Sample Size

The author aimed to interview between 5 – 7 young women and in the end interviewed five young women. This small sample size is consistent with both qualitative and

phenomenological approaches in research that aims to generate rich and detailed descriptions of the topic rather than making generalisations about populations (Liamputtong 2010).

### **4.3 Sample Selection**

To recruit participants the researcher approached gatekeepers. Gatekeepers are people who have access to people whom a researcher is trying to recruit (Liamputtong 2010).

Gatekeepers for this research included community and youth workers who ran young women's programs. They included CMY staff, Greater Dandenong and Casey Youth Networks, the Multicultural Youth Action Group and the researcher's professional networks.

The researcher identified and called gatekeepers in the first instance, and asked them to identify and approach potential participants. This initial contact was followed up with an email with information about the research, including a plain language statement and participant consent form to give to potential participants. The researcher then followed up again with another phone call and also spoke to gatekeepers whilst attending youth sector network meetings.

An incentive for the young women's participation was provided; a \$20 voucher courtesy of CMY. The researcher feels that the proposed incentive is appropriate because "it shows respect for participants' time... and can help to recruit a hidden and marginalised population" (Liamputtong 2010 p. 239).

### **4.4 Data Collection Methods**

The researcher used semi-structured in-depth individual interviews. Use of in-depth interviews is consistent with feminist methodology (Reinharz 1992). Interviews are seen as a

useful method for feminist research because “interviewing offers researchers’ access to people’s ideas, thoughts and memories in their own words rather than in the words of the researcher” (Reinharz 1992, p. 19).

An interview guide with broad themes was developed (see appendix one). The themes guided the interviews however the interviewees were “free to explore other issues which may be equally relevant to the topic... even if the connections *were* not always straightforward *or* transparent to the researcher” (Heath, Brooks, Cleaver & Ireland 2009, pp. 80-81).

Qualitative interviews are a youth friendly method of research because young people are often powerless and marginalized, so they’re a powerful tool to give young people a voice and have their experiences valued (Ibid.).

Visual resources were used to aid discussion in the interviews. In particular “Picture This Cards” were used, - a set of 75 graphic cards that help people reflect on their experiences (Innovative Resources 2009). Visual tools are increasingly used to aid discussion by youth researchers (Heath, Brook, Cleaver & Ireland 2009). The researcher asked participants to select a card and give a verbal interpretation of the meaning of the card. The verbal response was transcribed along with the rest of the interview data for analysis.

The interviews took between 40 minutes and 1.5 hours. The researcher negotiated mutually agreeable locations for interviews to take place to ensure convenience for the young women. Locations included public libraries and youth service facilities.

Participants were asked for their consent to record the discussions using an audio device and then this was transcribed in preparation for data analysis. Participants were also provided with a copy of their transcribed interview to give them the opportunity to provide feedback.

#### 4.5 Method of Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to explore and interpret the interview data. “Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data... It minimally organises and describes ...data set in (rich) detail” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.6). Steps in this technique included transcription, coding data, developing themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes and producing a report (Ibid.). Thematic analysis provided a good fit with this research for the following reasons:

- It works well with the feminist approach in that it presents the young women’s words in a more raw and authentic way without the researcher trying to develop theories based on the data, which would be another step removed from the original words of the young women.
- It has been suggested that thematic analysis is a good method for a novice researcher. Braun and Clarke (2006), suggest that it’s a relatively easy technique to learn and is accessible to new qualitative researchers. It fits with the researcher’s current skill level.



## 5. Limitations

As with any research there are limitations associated with this project.

### 5.1 Recruitment

Despite extensive promotion, difficulties were faced recruiting participants. The researcher called 39 services, spoke about the research at the South East CALD network meeting, emailed information to various youth services, promoted the project through the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria email lists, Melbourne University Youth Refugee Group email list, Youth Field Express Newsletter and visited an Afghan young mother's group on two occasions. Most of these recruitment strategies were unsuccessful.

To increase the number of participants the researcher identified two young women with whom she had an existing professional relationship and sought to interview them for this project. This fell outside the agreements in the ethics application which stated that she would not interview young women whom she had previously worked with. The researcher applied for an amendment to the ethics application but ran out of time to see this through. In hind sight, given the difficulties of recruiting from such a limited target group, better use of the researchers existing contacts with NAYW could have been used and made a part of her research proposal.

### 5.2 Language

English was a second language for all but one of the participants. This sometimes made it difficult for the young women to find the right words to express their ideas. It's likely that if the interviews were conducted in their own languages they would have been able to express themselves more fully.

The researcher found a young Afghan mother who wanted to participate in the research however she would have required a Dari interpreter. The worker who facilitated the program she was involved in offered to interpret for the young woman, however this would not be ideal because the young woman may not have felt comfortable to share any negative program experiences. Options to pay for an interpreter were explored to no avail and as a result the researcher was not able to include this young woman.

### **5.3 Culture**

The researcher comes from a different culture to the participants and has been influenced in her interpretation of the data by her own cultural lens. To overcome this to some extent she checked her findings with her co-researchers who were also familiar with the research data. However, the co-researchers were from a similar cultural background to the researcher's own. The researcher has provided extensive quotes to give a clear picture of the raw data from which she has drawn her discussion and conclusions.

### **5.4 Sample Size**

It could be argued that having a small sample size of five young women is a limitation. However small samples are more acceptable in qualitative phenomenological research methods that aim to richly describe and understand people's lives, rather than make generalisations about a larger population.

## 6. Presentation of Results

### 6.1 General overview of participants

Five young women aged between 19 and 21 years were interviewed. All of the young women had lived in Australia for less than five years. Four of the young women came from refugee or refugee like backgrounds and the remaining young woman had come to Australia on a student visa. Table 1 gives an overview of the young women in this research.

Table 1 – General overview of interview participants

	<b>Int. 1</b>	<b>Int.2</b>	<b>Int.3</b>	<b>Int. 4</b>	<b>Int. 5</b>
<b>Age</b>	21	19	20	19	19
<b>County of Birth</b>	Saudi Arabia	Afghanistan	Afghanistan	Afghanistan	Ethiopia
<b>Years living in Australia</b>	2	5	4 years, 6 months	3	1 year, 7 months
<b>Nature of young women's program</b>	Community based volunteer training program.	School based personal development.	School based personal development	School based personal development.	Community based leadership program
<b>Religion</b>	Muslim	Muslim	Muslim	Muslim	Orthodox Christian
<b>Transit Countries?</b>	Yes – not disclosed	Iran 2 years	Iran 1-2 years Pakistan 2 years	Pakistan 3 years	No

The themes that became apparent throughout the interviews are presented within four broad topic areas:

1. Young women and settlement;
2. Significance of family;
3. Gender and NAYW; and
4. Gender specific programs.

This section will also show a number of picture cards and quotes that NAYW used to describe what it's like to be a young woman from their original culture. The pictures are all from St Luke's Innovative Resources *Picture This* Cards.

## 6.2 Young Women and Settlement

### 6.2.1 Feeling Lucky to be Living in Australia

Three of the young women talked about feeling lucky to be in Australia. They came from countries where life was difficult and where they often feared for their safety. Comments included:

“First I came to Australia I was thinking like we have a very safety life, then before when we come and I feel so happy like to be in Australia because... It's a better life to be here.” (Int. 3)

“I was really happy to come here you know, to live with my dad in a safe and peaceful country.” (Int. 3)

“I feel very lucky living here...I'm not saying that Australia is a perfect country but I'm saying it's ahead in certain things” (Int. 1)

### 6.2.2 Hope for Future

The young women in this research demonstrated resilience to adapt to new situations and overcome difficulties. The young women remained hopeful for their futures. One young woman said she wanted to become a pilot and another participant plans to study medicine.

### 6.2.3 Feeling Different

All the young women expressed that they felt very different. Key differences related to gender roles, culture, school, people, clothing and food. Difference was a major recurring theme. When the interviewer asked one of the participants if there were any similarities between her culture and Australian culture she answered:

“Not the same, everything is different. Everything.” (Int. three)

Another participant reflected on the difference between Australian and Afghan communities and how hard it had been for her when she arrived here:

”It was strange. The first time I walked into the streets it was all quiet. You know in Afghanistan and Pakistan the streets, they are full of people, everywhere, people walking, but here I thought, oh my god, where are all the people...It was really hard for me because everything was new to me, the people, the lifestyle, everything. Even the school.” (Int. 4)

Another young woman said:

“Whoa, it’s really different. Everything is different. Like the way we talk with people, the way we dress up, the way like, how people do something, everything when someone does. Everything is different. Like, the first time when I come to school I was like, everything was new. I was like sitting there doing nothing. I was a new animal at the zoo.” (Int. 5)

#### **6.2.4 Judgement, Stereotypes and Bullying**

The young women’s feeling of difference was often compounded by being stereotyped and bullied by the people around them in Australia. Three of the young women discussed their experiences of being excluded and marginalised for being different.

One young woman, an international student, said that people often ask her if she is a refugee and assume that she can’t speak English, which makes her feel uncomfortable. She spoke about how bonding with other international students helped her to feel more settled.

Participants also talked about being bullied because of their cultural practices. One participant said:

“I really find it hard here in Australia. Now I’m ok, but it’s really hard for me. Like the costume that I wear. Sometimes outside, I get bullied from people. Like when I

wear scarf I get bullied cause it's my culture. It's my religion, culture and this cloth is my culture so I have to wear this.” (Int.2)

Another participant also talked about experiencing bullying when she went to mainstream school.

“The students, some of them are kind of rude. I don't know why and it was hard for me to tolerate. They're bullying you and saying stuff... Like some of them, they are making fun of my Scarf, or the way that I dress or the way that I pronounce things differently and a funny thing, I didn't know the swearing and when they are swearing I didn't understand what they are saying.” (Int.4)

It was not uncommon for young women to be bullied because of their headscarves or clothing. Young women said:

“Because of my Scarf um in my class, like the girls they laughed at me. Like look at the scarf, why are they wearing that, like yeah, because of the scarf I have been bullied and because of the costume, like look at them, wearing this longer dresses and scarf.” (Int. 4)

### **6.2.5 Beliefs**

Despite the difficulties the young women experience in terms of cultural and religious discrimination, religion remains an important positive factor in the young women's lives.

When talking about being bullied one young woman said

“They say, they can say everything to me but I just don't mind. I just move on. Let them laugh. It's maybe humorous for them. For me doesn't matter because this is my belief and my culture so I don't mind.” (Int 2.)

### **6.2.6 Loss of Cultural Traditions**

Holding onto, respecting and practising their culture of origin was very important. One participant spoke about her sadness about not being able to celebrate Eid in the same way she had in her country of origin. She said:

“The things we used to celebrate really like powerful in Afghanistan and Pakistan, we can’t do it here...Eid is the special celebration day for Muslim people. On Eid day we go to school here but in Afghanistan we supposed to stay home and you know enjoy, yeah, and that’s the hard thing, that some time it makes me like, on the night of Eid I sit and cry, cause I get really emotional, you know I used to be with friends, family together and celebrate but here it’s like really normal. Makes it hard. It’s really hard for me....I used to cry a lot because of everything that we used to do in Afghanistan and Pakistan but we can’t do it.” (Int. 2)

### 6.2.7 Language

A common difficulty experienced by all of the participants was the impact of not being able to communicate easily. A few participants described this as the hardest challenge for them when they came to Australia. It had an impact on their sense of belonging, education, confidence and participation.

One participant talked about how a lack of English impacted on her studies.

“It was really hard for me ‘cause English is our second language... I was like getting depressed most of the time because cause I was really behind from my other friends, you know” (Int. 2)

Another young woman spoke about how language was an obvious challenge faced by her and other young people at her English Language School. It was difficult for her to communicate in English and she found the pronunciation difficult.

A further participant explained that she had learnt some English before coming to Australia but she found pronunciation of words difficult. Although it helped her to know some English, she was not confident to speak and this impacted on many areas of her life.

“Like at school, like I was because I didn’t have confidence, even though I know a little bit, my English is not good, but I have this little bit English, and I want to say something, like I can’t just say it. I get like to protect myself. I just say nothing. I just listen and feel bad.” (Int.5)

### 6.2.8 Settlement

Some of the factors that aided settlement for participants included having freedom of movement, language, access to education, being with others who shared similar experiences and being with people who accepted them the way they were.

“I can go anywhere here without any scaredness. I can go out, do shopping and know that no one is going to talk behind me or no one is going to stop me from doing something...The good thing is this one, I’m freedom to study here and it’s a good opportunity for me to study here, you know do everything, to work, yeah.” (Int. 2)

Another participant also talked about the importance of feeling free. She said:

“I feel better to live in Australia because it’s a very safe country. We are free in here because in our country we are not free to be” (Int. 3)

On the other hand some of the things that made settling in Australia difficult, as demonstrated by the comments, were learning a new language, being bullied, feeling different and learning how to use transport.

“It was hard to talk to people who know well English and the other thing is transportation. You know back in Pakistan and Afghanistan we always went walking, we never used car or bus and it was hard for me to use buses” (Int. 4)

One of the participants talked about traveling a lot and how it was normal for people to come and go from her life. She picked this picture card and her description is provided below.



### Picture One - Interview one – Aeroplane Wing



“I think for me travel is very routine part of my life. I think every three months we have to go overseas or its very fluid, people come and go into our lives, people leave it, not leave it, exit for a while.” (Int. 1)

### 6.3 Significance of Family

Another recurring theme was the importance of the young women’s families. Families were a major influence on young women’s lives. Families are a place where young women negotiated decision making and accessed support. The young women said that being with family made it easier for them to settle. One young woman reflected on how settlement is more difficult for those without families. She said:

“I feel like some people might not have as much family support and I think after speaking to some women, they don’t have, especially if they come without family

they have no connection, they have to start literally from scratch and that's very difficult" (Int. 1)

Being close to family was an important part of their culture. One young woman said:

"In our culture it's important, you have respect, especially elders and then family they live together and then they should not leave their parents, like when they are old, they should take care of them and the other important thing is we should socialise with each other. Like we should always be in that community because that's how we support each other." (Int.2)

### **6.3.1 Collective Culture and Family Decision Making**

One of the participants described her culture as collectivist and then went on to explain that decision making for young women happens within the family through discussion and negotiation. Another said:

"It's a bit difficult to define which culture I belong in, but regardless I would describe it as collectivist. It's more collective. So when we make decisions we would involve people of, you know, our family and let them know... I think we tend to use more discussion within the family and like, very close friends." (Int. 1)

One participant said:

"Oh, when we face one problem, when a family face a problem then the other members should help them and talking and discussing and deciding what to do." (Int. 4)

Some of the decisions that young women negotiated with family included careers, choice of study, who to marry, who to live with, going out with friends and participation in programs.

### **6.3.2 Family Support**

Young women in this research often talked about feeling supported by family members.

Families supported their involvement in the young women's programs and young women felt

they had considerable agency and capacity to make decisions as long as this was discussed with family members. One of the young women said:

“My parents are really supportive. My family are happy that I am involved in different activities including this program” (Int.1)

The young women discussed that young men had more freedom and choice within the family (discussed in section 6.4).

### **6.3.3 Arranged Marriage**

When discussing the differences between their culture and culture in Australia, three of the young women from Afghan backgrounds talked about the cultural practice of arranged marriage. They explained that unlike girls in Australia, their parents will choose who they marry through a process of negotiation with them. Young women said:

“We can’t choose our own husband, but our dad chooses but I think that it’s good that they choose someone for me ‘cause they know more than me....If my dad choose someone for me, if they (the husband) be horrible to me than later on I can blame my mother and father, not myself because they choose for me, but they never force me for things”. (Int.2)

“One rules like we can’t choose our husband, when we get married. Like our parents choose for us. We can’t choose.” (Int. 3)

“Even if you love someone you have to tell them to come and propose. To meet your family but it’s not the case for boys.” (Int.3)

Arranged marriage provides a good example of how some decisions are negotiated through the family and how much respect is given to parents.

### **6.3.4 Gender and Family Communication**

Although this was not explored in great depth it appeared that gender and perhaps age impacted on how young women communicated within the family. One young woman said:

“It’s easy to be a girl in my family but I think that we are not really open as other Australian girls are with their parents... We are not that close with our parents... but we can talk to our big sister, like our brother, close friend or aunty. We can talk to our mother... We tell things with our mother and our mother tells our dad.” (Int. 2)

Another participant noted that young women tend to hide their true feelings - they don’t feel comfortable sharing their feelings so they tend not to talk to their parents and family. This is reflected in this picture card that a young woman chose.

## Picture Two - Interview Four – Masks



“Sometimes you pretend to be someone you are really not really that person. Most of the girls they are in general, they don’t say anything about their feelings. They pretend to be what others think and because most of them, their families don’t understand them and they hide their feelings inside. They don’t talk to their parents or some of their family.”

(Int. 4)



## 6.4 Gender and Newly Arrived Young Women

### 6.4.1 Safety and Protection

Young women in this research talked a lot about the need for women to be protected and to be kept safe. They talked about needing to cover up because boys can't control themselves and that women need extra protection because they can't protect themselves. This was a common theme. They said:

“So the girl has to protect themselves because the guy can't control themselves. So it's the girls' responsibility to protect themselves from the guys... even if they get married it's really hard for them because they beat them if they don't listen to them. If they do bad thing, even though if you, without asking them if you get out of the house, they will beat you and stuff.” (Int. 2)

“They say because that the girls are weaker and cannot protect themselves if something happen to them. So that's not good. Like, yeah when they believe that boy, they can protect themselves because they are boys.” (Int. 4)

### 6.4.2 Safety in Country of Origin

Some of the young women talked about how females are particularly unsafe in their countries of origin. This came across in all of the interviews but was explained in more depth by the young women from Afghanistan. They said:

“I'm really worried about other girls in Afghanistan... I know there is freedom now in Afghanistan but still it's hard, like in Afghanistan if you are a girl, there are boys and they are doing bad stuff with them.” (Int. 2)

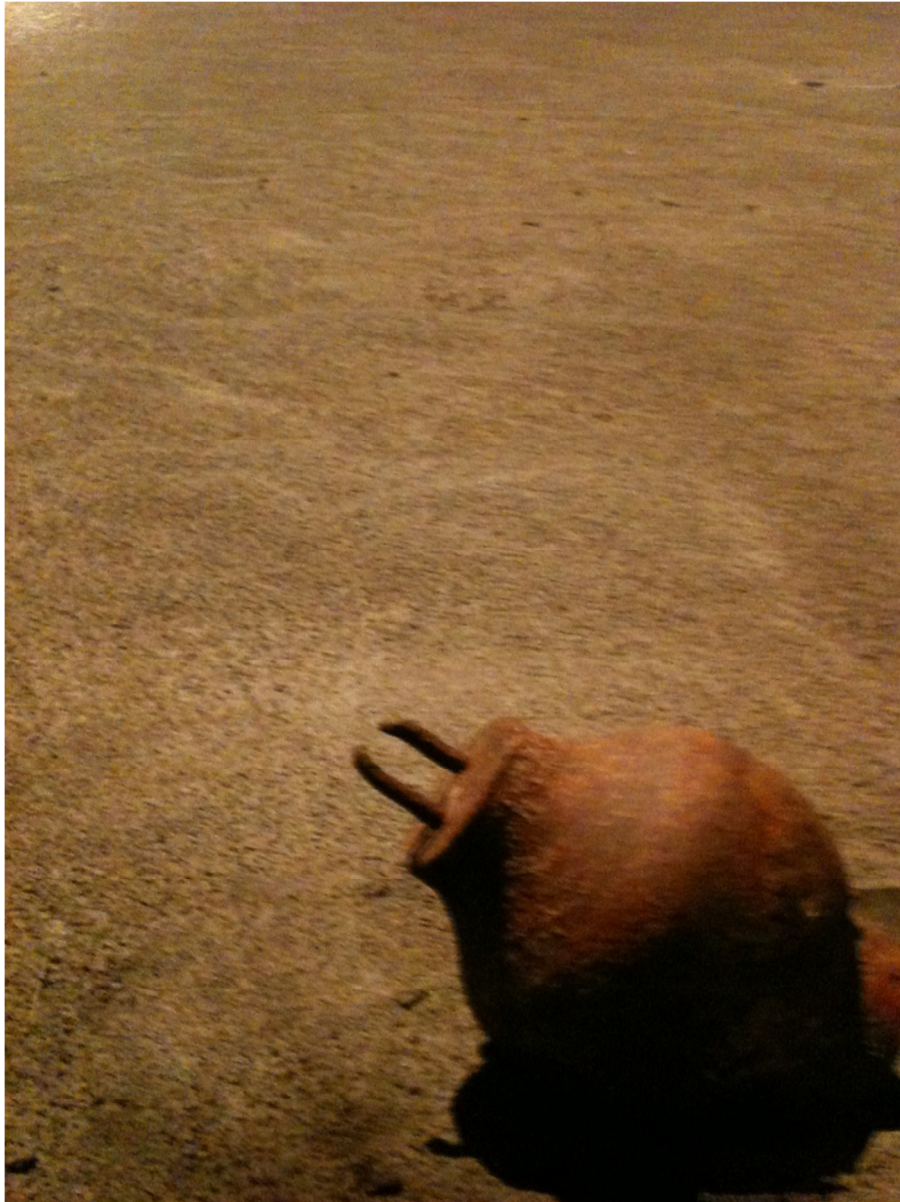
A few of the young women talked about not being able to access education before they came to Australia because of safety fears. One young woman said:

“Every time we heard like in the other village, the Taliban burned down the school or give some, you know the viruses to the girls so they die. I think for all Hazara it's really difficult. It was really dangerous. It's still going on in Afghanistan. Like the

girls getting sick because they put something in the water so they get killed, like poison.” (Int.2)

One of the participants picked the following picture card to describe what it’s like to be a young woman in her culture. It reflects how unsafe she felt in her country of origin.

**Picture Three - Interview Two – Bomb**



“This reminds me of war in Afghanistan. That we used to hear in our house, we used to hear every day like the sounds and I see this and I get really emotional because our, so many people getting killed in Hazara community in Pakistan and Afghanistan and

it's still going on there...girls that go to school there, on the way they're getting killed... if they go to school, they don't come back". (Int.2)

Another participant talked about how women live in fear in other countries that she has lived in. She explained that this is not a concern for men:

"They (men) probably don't fear things as much. Like I have guy friends who don't mind living in those countries... or anywhere else because to them being abused is not something that they fear. Whereas as a women... there are so many things that you have to consider, like at a certain time of night or a certain place there is always that, you just have a tendency to be fearful." (Int. 1)

#### **6.4.3 Restrictions for Women**

The perceived need to protect women is often used as a reason to place more restrictions on them. These restrictions exist in the countries they came from and also here in Australia.

Young women talked about being restricted in terms of when and where they go out. For example:

"In our culture girls are not allowed to be free like boys. Like you should be at home before sunset. We cannot go out at night with friends, ah yeah." (Int.4)

"They (females) can't walk alone by themselves. I'm here, walking around going shopping but in Afghanistan they can't go shopping by themselves. They are not even allowed to go to shop." (Int. 2)

This was further explained by participant two who also said:

"The girls has to be home before sunset because girls can't protect themselves you know. They don't have the power to protect themselves. So that's why we have to be home before sunset and we are not allowed to go out at night by ourselves cause of the dangerous, but for boys when they are older, they are maybe over twenty, um they can go anywhere." (Int. 2)

Participant four also talked about feeling restricted.



“Boys are allowed to go with their friends and travel as far as they can and girls are not. Someone should be with them. Yeah. It’s kind of not allowing girls to have complete freedom and there should always be someone to watch over them and I think it’s not right because they can decide what to do and not only boys.” (Int. 4)

She also said:

“Generally boys have more freedom. Boys can work if they have to work. They can work night shifts or evenings but girls cannot... they can choose their life partner...” (Int. 4)

Another young woman explained that women in Ethiopia have traditionally been excluded from leadership roles and public places. This is reflected in this picture card that she chose and her description of it.

#### Picture Four - People Gathering in Public



“I can see on the card there is a lot of different peoples. I mean like boys and girls, women and mens. So I can see that there is a woman, next to that guy, which seems she’s going to talk or she is helping him. So this shows me the equality between girls and boys and they are all going to different places because back home, girls are not usually participate in outside. They only do house things.” (Int. 5)

#### 6.4.4 Gender Roles are Unfair and Double Standards Exist.

When the researcher asked participants to pick a card to represent what it’s like to be young women in their culture, two Afghan young women picked the following picture card with plates and utensils. They talked about how traditionally in their culture women’s roles are in the home, cooking, cleaning and taking care of family. Here is the picture and their descriptions.

**Picture Five - Interview Two and Three – Dinner Plate**



“This one reminds me; the girls used to have like wash the dishes and cook always in our culture, in Afghanistan especially. We have to cook, we have to wash the dishes. Everything with dish we have to, the woman and girls should do it. Like the woman do the house work and the man should do the outside work, bring money.” (Int.2)

“This card means to be a good cooker, to be a good cooking for my family, for other people like to show my food...before we live in Afghanistan, only the man is working. The woman is not working, they stay at home just cooking, cleaning, especially for the girl, but here it's like equal.” (Int.3)

The young women also often described and experienced gender differences as unfair, particularly in relation to feeling restricted and decision making.

“Sometimes I feel really sad. I really feel sad because my brothers goes everywhere...If I go somewhere, if I be late home, they will ask me where were you? And I have to tell them every single thing but if my brother, the whole day he go

somewhere and they come home they never ask them... But for a girl that's I think sometimes unfair, because they asking only the girls... Parents are a bit harder on girls, more strict on girls; there are rules to be a girl. Sometimes I find it really hard to be a girl." (Int. 2)

One participant said that she didn't want to get married because it would change her role. She said:

"When you marry you are not yourself anymore. You have to be for your partner. You have to do everything. You have to share everything but if you live alone you can live for yourself and you can have your life for yourself. (Int. 4)

One of the participants picked the following picture card to describe how she felt restricted as a young woman. The picture reflects a feeling of watching rather than participating.



## Picture Six - Interview Four – Girl at the Window



“In our culture girls are not allowed to do many things, especially things boys can do and sometimes when you ask them why I cannot do that thing they say because you are a girl and there is no logical reason for that”. (Int. 4)

### 6.4.5 Boys Valued More than Girls

Some young women talked about feeling less valued than young men. One young woman said:

“Females are really low in Afghanistan, like really low.” (Int 2)

When asked what it's like to be a girl in her family, participant four said:

“They value girl but not as much as a boy but they try to protect the girls and try to fulfil their needs.” (Int.4)

The researcher asked one young woman why boys are valued more and she said:

“I think it's because of the old thinking. In the old time having boys was more better because they stay with the family but the girls they will marry and go... because in the end they (boys) will take care of you but the girls will go and have their own and ... they can't take care of the parents.” (Int. 4)

#### **6.4.6 Gender Issues Worse for Others and Change is Occurring**

Three young women explained that although gender roles in their families have been significant there was a sense that this is worse for other young women that they know. They explain that in their families they have more choice and freedom compared to others they know.

They also noted that there have been some positive changes in the countries they have lived in, in terms of gender roles. Participant five explained that women are taking up more leadership roles in Ethiopia now. She said:

“I'm proud that I am a girl but there is a lot of difficulties. Allot of battles to go, to do something better than the boys. It's always hard. In my culture, now it's getting better but before only girls don't go to school. They only stay at home cooking, washing and looking after their husbands and kids” (Int.5)

## 6.5 Gender Specific Programs

### 6.5.1 Gender Specific Programs in Country of Origin

Only one of the young women had participated in a gender specific program before arriving in Australia. Most had not heard about them and so were not sure if the opportunity existed.

The participant who had participated in a women's program at her school in Ethiopia explained that young women could get some support at school but no groups existed outside of school. She explained:

“We talk something about girls, yeah what we should do. Like when I was in year seven my teacher, she used to teach us how we don't have to get frustrated when we have menstruation and stuff because most of our parents, they don't go to school. So the teacher teaches us for girls and then how we have to face a life of difficulties.”

(Int. 5)

### 6.5.2 Positive Feelings about Young Women's Programs

Since arriving in Australia the young women participated in different kinds of women's programs, including a volunteer training program, school based personal development programs and a community based leadership program.

All of the participants discussed their experiences in the programs as positive and participation helped them to feel more settled living in Australia. Young women talked about the benefits:

“(I feel) good because I learnt new things and its really good to share your feelings with someone and it's better when there is group and there are girls and maybe the feelings you have are the same like others.” (Int. 4)

“It's good experience not bad, it's a good experience. It's good because they learn something and they make a friendship and they improve like.” (Int. 3)

“Like, it’s good experience because like before, like when you come to some different country, like you don’t even have a friend and you don’t have anyone to talk to, you into some groups where you fit in and then let yourself out and then you get a lot of ideas to shape things.” (Int. 5)

### **6.5.3 Talking to Others is Helpful**

The young women’s programs provided participants with the opportunity to communicate with others and share their ideas, feelings and experiences. A strong recurring theme in the interviews was the discourse of talking or not talking. Young women discussed how beneficial it was for them to share and talk about their feelings and experiences.

“I think it’s a safe place to talk about women’s issues... between women and to know that you’re not alone. It’s something that happens to other people.” (Int. 1)

“I think it’s really beneficial for them if they like attend those program. It helps a lot I think... Yeah, but it’s really beneficial for young women, to talk about their feelings, if they can’t do it with their parents you know. They’re not able to talk to their friends, or other people you know.. Like those girls there, you can talk to them. It’s really good I think. It gives confidence.” (Int. 2)

“(I felt more confident) because it was like group and you had to talk. It also helped me to improve my English like spelling, meaning and pronunciation. When you know something well you are so confident about it.”(Int. 3)

“I was like shying and maybe me wrong if I say something and then when I go in that program they saying you have to talk like, they teach us, then I feel confident. Then I know how to talk with other people” (Int.3)

### **6.5.4 Gender and Communication with Boys**

Some of the young women indicated that in their cultures it was not appropriate or comfortable for them to openly communicate with boys. In fact if the programs that they were involved with had young men participating in it they wouldn’t have had such a rewarding experience.



“We are not allowed to talk to boys or go hang around with boys but in Australia they doesn’t care. They can be friendly with boys, but ours, we can’t. Sometimes it’s really hard for me because we can be friends with boys and there is people really that have a clean heart... and if they are my classmate, you know, in front of my dad I don’t have the ability to talk to them because my dad will think... bad of me, even though I’m not bad but it’s still something that makes my parents worried.” (Int. 2)

“(If there were boys in the group it would be different) because, especially the boys from our country, like I look at them I feel shy because we are not looking at the man. Like, eyes to eyes. I feel not be.” (Int. 3)

“(It would be different with boys) because when you are with boys you don’t say the truth really... because when you get out they will tease you.” (Int. 4)

“(If there where boys in the group) it might be different because they will be like, boys talk louder and stuff and you will be shy when they talk, yeah.” (Int.5)

Mixing with boys was not culturally appropriate for the young women and there were also some topics like “girls’ stuff” that certainly would never be discussed with boys.

Another participant said that gender specific groups were important because:

“There are certain services that are just suited for women. I think women understand women’s issues, more than men can. I think they can appreciate that there are certain issues, but I don’t think they can fully understand what the issues are and sometimes they don’t think that it’s an issue.” (Int. 1)

### **6.5.5 Benefits of the Programs**

Young women mentioned a number of positive benefits from their involvement with the programs including:

- Learning how to support women experiencing abuse;
- Having a safe place to be with other women and talk;
- Feeling more ambitious, motivated, confident;
- Increased self-esteem;

- Having a place to explore personal values and identity;
- Reduced depression and isolation;
- Learning new skills;
- Improved English skills;
- Helping with study;
- Making friends and connections;
- Linking into other programs and supports;
- Learning leadership skills; and
- Helping to make settlement easier.

The two suggestions that young women made to improve the groups they were involved with were to run programs that don't clash with class time and provide even more opportunities for discussion with each other.

#### **6.5.6 Respectful Workers**

All of the young women said that they felt respected by the workers involved in the programs. They said:

“They were really nice. More than I expect. Like we say things about our religion. Like I thought maybe they might, do some bad reaction, show some bad reaction, but I didn't see that in their face, like were respected. If we talked about like sad feelings, they were like you know, they would have been respected, they would have been sad with us. Those things especially.” (Int. 2)

“She always respects us. Like we talk and she respect. We say something in our religion and she respect and sometimes we tell something from our country and she like upset, and say like, feeling very hard like. She feeling us.” (Int. 3)

### **6.5.7 Worker Communication with Parents is Helpful**

Four out of the five young women said that the workers involved had some communication with their parents or guardian. Young women said that this communication helped them to be involved in the programs:

“Most of the time when we go somewhere, I’m going with that worker my parent say ‘yeah, yeah go. If it’s with that worker, go’”. (Int. 2)

“When she meet my mum and dad and like they talk to each other, and then my father believe her. Like if you say anything, you take my daughter anywhere. My parents doesn’t care because they know her.” (Int.3)

One of the participants explained how the workers of another program she was involved with met with her brother to discuss an opportunity for her to go on a camp. She was not initially allowed to attend because there were boys and her brother wasn’t sure if she would be protected. The young women’s brother permitted her to attend during the day, after discussing the program with the worker.

### **6.5.8 Family more Favourable towards Women’s Groups**

Young women indicated that their parents and guardians were more favourable towards them joining gender specific groups.

One of the participants indicated that her family felt more comfortable sending her to a girls group for religious reasons.

“They feel like they not be happy was stay with the boy because its not allowed in our religion.” (Int. 3)

Another young woman said that her father would say:

“There are boys and you cannot trust boys. Yeah, don’t get involved with things with boys.” (Int. 4)

## 7. Discussion of Findings

### 7.1 Young Women and Settlement

The interviews indicated that while NAYW felt lucky to be living in Australia they faced many challenges settling. Young women expressed that the culture of their country of origin felt very different to Australian culture. This feeling of difference was often exacerbated by being bullied and stereotyped. Young women in the interviews were bullied about their clothes, particularly the hijab, and their language.

This experience of discrimination is consistent with other research about the needs of young people from refugee backgrounds which has found discrimination to be a major source of social exclusion (Gifford, Correa-Velez & Sampson 2009). More recently, the Human Rights Commission reported that in the last year there has been a 60% rise in the number of racism related complaints and that this is more common for immigrant and refugee women (Kozaki 2013).

It has been well documented that Muslim beliefs and cultures are often “negatively stereotyped and subjected to significant interpersonal and structural discrimination” (Ciftci, Jones & Corrigan 2013 p.23). This certainly has been a common experience of young women in this research who experience being “bullied” for wearing their head-scarves.

The experience of discrimination has the potential to affect at least three of the areas that O’Sullivan & Ollif (2006) identified as being significant for good settlement: environmental factors, wellbeing/connectedness and agency. Having strategies to put in place to prevent racism will be important to prevent negative outcomes from occurring and to promote a more positive settlement experience.

Young women in this research said that the young women's programs were spaces where they felt safe and made positive connections. They indicated that their involvement helped them to feel more settled in Australia. This is consistent with the youth work approach that advocates the use of groups as a therapeutic approach for young people. "Shared activities enable young people with similar circumstances, identities or experiences to develop positive relationships, learn from each other and have a voice in issues that affect them" (Sapin 2009, p. 75).

The opportunity to practice their English skills in a safe group environment was extremely important. Lack of English was cited as one of the biggest challenges they faced since arriving in Australia. Young women reported that one of the biggest benefits of the program was the opportunity to talk and express their feelings. As a result of their involvement in the program they often felt more confident in other areas of their lives.

Practising religious and cultural beliefs was a source of strength for the young women as they settled here and conversely not having the ability to practice their cultural beliefs had a negative impact on their wellbeing. This raises the question of how services can create an atmosphere where young people feel connected to their cultural and religious identities.

Young women in this research articulated things that had a positive impact in their lives, including: being with family; spending time with people who have shared similar experiences; having connections to people who can give you information; freedom of movement; access to education; language and being with people who accepted them the way they were. Research participants gained many of these things from their involvement in young women's programs.

Participants spoke about the positive impact that being involved in a young women's program had on their settlement. Young women spoke about how it was positive and

culturally appropriate for them to be engaged in a gender specific program. It's possible that the importance of this has been missed in previous research about the settlement needs of NAYW, as existing literature about the settlement needs of young people hasn't addressed gender as a significant factor (such as Paxton, Smith, Win Mulholland & Hood 2011; Gifford, Correa-Velez & Sampson 2009; Giddens, 2003; Francis & Cornfoot 2007 and O'Sullivan & Olliff 2006).

## 7.2 Significance of Family

Being connected to family was very important to young women in this research. Families are a place where young women negotiate decision making. The decision making usually occurred with immediate family and sometimes with extended family. Young women make decisions about going out, education and who to marry through a process of discussion and negotiation. One of the participants used the term 'collectivist' to describe her culture.

The significance of family has been noted in literature about the settlement needs of young people (Francis & Cornfoot 2007; O'Sullivan & Olliff 2006), which has emphasised the need for services to engage with families and to better understand the dynamics of family. "Family involvement had positive outcomes for young people and family, promotes community connections and can enhance cultural sensitivity of school programs" (Francis & Cornfoot 2007, p. 17).

Worker communication with family is important to assist young women to be able to participate in programs so that they can benefit from the programs which will assist with the settlement process. Young women in this research indicated that when workers who ran the young women's programs communicated with their families, this helped their families to understand what they were doing, which made them more willing to let them participate. This is consistent with current good culturally sensitive practice.

Providing a service inclusive of family and community can be a significant factor in culturally-competent service delivery. Some parents/family members may not give permission for a young person to attend your service (programs or activities) if they don't understand or trust what you offer. (CMY 2011, p.2)

Feminists have argued that families are an institution where patriarchy and the practice of power over women are enforced. That it's "one of the many institutions in both the public and private spheres which reproduce patriarchal relations in society"(Sargent, Nilan & Winter 1997, p.129). From this perspective it could be argued that the young women in this research are disempowered because many decisions in their lives need to be negotiated in family structures where patriarchal structures exist.

Through the experience of conducting this research, the researcher is now cautious about this perspective and approach to viewing NAYW's lives. Recent theories of feminism such as intersectionalism are more appropriate for exploring the lives of women who potentially experience multiple dimensions of oppression, such as age, class, gender and culture.

Participants in this research felt supported by their families and that their families supported them to be involved in things that were good for them. Families shared problems, used discussion and helped each other to develop plans and solutions together. Young women had agency within this negotiation process; however a few of the participants also spoke about feeling like they are not able to openly communicate with their parents. Sometimes it was easier for them to discuss their feeling with siblings or extended family.

### **7.3 Gender and Newly Arrived Young Women**

The interviews showed that gender has a significant impact on the lives of NAYW. Young women in this research came from countries where gendered violence and fear for women's safety are a part of everyday life. Three of the young women talked about not being able to access education in Afghanistan because it was particularly unsafe for young women. One of

the young women talked about how unsafe it was when her father was absent from the family.

Gender also determines the roles that young women have. The participants described the roles of men and women in these cultures as very different. While men go to work or war and take on leadership roles, women's roles have been to stay at home and take care of household duties such as cooking and caring for family.

Young women spoke about the need for women to be protected. This perceived need to protect young women is often used as a reason to place more restrictions on young women. Participants said that young women need to protect themselves from boys and they need to be protected because they can't protect themselves. Young women talked about having to be home before sunset, not socialising with boys, not having the same freedom as young men and not being able to travel far from home. A few young women described these restrictions as unfair or not having any logical reason.

When discussing these gender roles, young women said that gender roles and restrictions appear to be worse for other young women that they know. A few of the young women acknowledged that things have been 'more equal' since coming to Australia.

This research used a feminist framework to give voice to a group of young women who are not usually heard by academics and policy makers (Neuman 1991). Gender is an important consideration in the context of this research because by exploring gender we can see that the settlement experiences of young men and young women are partly shaped by gender. This illuminates the appropriateness of gender specific groups.

Traditional feminism would likely interpret the experiences of young women in this research, as young women being oppressed by patriarchal systems such as family. However the author



argues that looking at NAYW in this way is too simplistic. A useful theoretical framework for considering issues that affect NAYW is intersectionalism. Intersectionalism has been defined as an understanding of “the complex relationships between different identities (e.g., race, gender, sexual orientation, class, and disability) and forms of oppression.” (Cifti, Jones & Corrigan 2013, p. 20).

This research has begun to unpack the experiences of these young women’s lives. We can see that gender is a significant dimension impacting on their lived experiences. However intersectionalism encourages us to understand the dimensions shaping young women’s existences. The interviews demonstrate that religion, class, age and culture all help to shape the way NAYW experience the world.

By considering how NAYW experience gender specific programs using an intersectionalist framework it would become necessary to explore how other factors such as age and class impact on their experience of gender specific programs. This would be useful, however it is not within the scope of this research project. Instead the author has aimed to give voice to young women relating to the research question without drawing conclusions about the power relations in their lives.

## **7.4 Gender Specific Programs**

The literature review indicated that gender specific groups may be particularly culturally appropriate for newly arrived women in the context of violence prevention, for Muslim women and for the delivery of sexual health information. However, after interviewing young women in this research, the researcher would argue that gender specific groups can play an even greater role in the lives of NAYW, in terms of providing a range of positive benefits that can aid the settlement process.

The literature review identified two program evaluations (*Girls' Space* and *Lead on Again*) that indicated that NAYW experience gender specific groups as positive (Turnbull 2012; Blustein 2013). This was supported by what young women said in this research. Young women expressed overwhelmingly positive feelings about their involvement in the young women's programs that they participated in. They experienced multiple benefits including increased contacts, improved personal sense of well-being, learning new skills and linking into other opportunities and supports.

This research uncovered in more detail some of the reasons why gender specific groups can be such a useful intervention and why these positive outcomes were achieved.

One of the biggest benefits of the young women's programs was the opportunity to talk to other people and share their feelings. The benefits of talking included knowing that they weren't alone, exploring their own ideas and feelings, feeling safe, increasing English skills, increasing confidence and reducing isolation. They programs provide an opportunity for young women to talk about issues and feelings in a way that they find therapeutic.

It became clear that having a space specifically for young women was very important. Some young women discussed that it was not culturally appropriate for them to mix with boys and that being around young men made some of them feel shy. One of the young women said that her father would disapprove if he were to see her mixing with young men. Young women said that their parents and guardians are more favourable about their participation in gender specific groups.

This research also identified some practice considerations that youth workers can consider when planning or running groups. They include:

- Having transparent clear organisational values to help create safety;

- Awareness that young women felt respected by staff when staff listened to their stories and showed genuine feelings in regards to what was being expressed; and
- Availability to meet with and develop trust with families to facilitate permission for participation.

Despite the many benefits of running gender specific groups that have been identified, the researcher experienced difficulty finding NAYW that had participated in gender specific groups. In Melbourne only five programs specifically targeting culturally diverse young women were identified and very few generalists programs for young women were available. Several youth services said there was “a lack of need” for gender specific groups. The researcher found that women’s organisations generally didn’t target young people. This indicates that there is a potential gap in the provision of this kind of service to young women, which could be explored with further research and service mapping.

## 8. Conclusion

This thesis explored how NAYW experienced gender specific programs. A literature review indicated that very little has been written about the needs of NAYW. The literature indicated that gender specific groups are useful in terms of violence prevention, supporting Muslim young women and the provision of sexual health information. However by speaking to young women who had participated in young women's programs it became clear that gender specific groups can also have the broader positive impact of aiding the settlement process.

NAYW often spoke about feeling very different which was exacerbated by their experience of being bullied. Literature indicates that migrant and refugee young women experience more discrimination than migrant and refugee men (Kozaki 2013). This has been identified as a risk factor that could negatively impact on settlement. Programs for NAYW provide a safe place where they can make connections with others who have similar experiences and reduce their sense of isolation and feeling different.

This research confirmed that NAYW experience many benefits from being involved in gender specific programs. The phenomenological approach, including in depth interview and the feminist approach of exploring issues relating to gender, have provided some insights about why these groups are a positive experience.

Many NAYW come from countries characterised with patriarchal systems and gendered violence. Young women used the discourse of 'young women needing protection'. This protection often means that they experience a lot of restrictions in terms of their movements and personal agency. Young women talked about the need to negotiate decisions about their lives with their families.

Families are places where many young women receive tremendous support and protection. This supports existing literature that identifies families as an important element of newly

arrived young people's lives. This research confirmed that when workers communicate with significant family members this creates a trust between the worker and family that can help to facilitate permission for young women's participation.

Participants spent a lot of time talking about the value of being able to talk with other young women and share their experiences and feelings. This appeared to be the single most valuable part of being involved in the program for participants. Services shouldn't underestimate the value of providing spaces where NAYW feel safe to communicate. This allows them to explore their identity, develop English skills and increase support networks.

This research highlighted that gender is a significant factor influencing the way that some NAYW experience life. NAYW experience issues in settlement that are specific to them such as negotiation of female gender roles and the challenge of feeling different due to discrimination in the community. For young women in this research it was more culturally acceptable for them to engage in groups with other young women. The positive impact of the programs meant that their involvement in the groups eased some of the challenges of settlement.

## 9. Implications for practice and further research

- The common experience of young women being bullied suggests that our communities are often discriminating and persecuting of people from minority cultures. Programs that promote social cohesion and mutual respect towards diversity are important in alleviating the incidence of bullying being experienced by NAYW.
- There is very little attention to gender in research and literature about the needs of newly arrived and refugee young people. This research found that gender has a significant impact on how these young people experience their lives. The author recommends that future reports about the needs of newly arrived people consider gender as a significant factor.
- NAYW reported that gender specific programs are positive and helpful in settlement. The researcher recommends that more services apply for funding to provide gender specific interventions.
- While a feminist framework was useful to give voice to a marginalised group and explore the gender dimension of the population, the researcher recommends that future research about and with NAYW consider using an intersectionalist theoretical framework to better consider other dimensions that may impact on young women's lives.
- That services draw on good practice for working with culturally diverse young people (CMY 2011) and consider the importance of family in working with NAYW and take the opportunity to engage with families where possible.

- This research offered a snap-shot of the lives of five NAYW. Important themes have emerged that can help youth workers, researchers and policy makers understand the specific experiences in their lives and the implications for services. More research is needed to better understand how factors such as gender, age, class, culture and sexuality impact on NAYW and how they access services.
- That this research be distributed across the youth sector, particularly for services wanting to engage with NAYW.

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## 11.Appendices

## 11.1 Ethics Approval Letter

19 April 2013

Ms L.E. Scaffidi  
Paediatrics Royal Children's Hospital  
The University of Melbourne

Dear Ms Scaffidi

I am pleased to advise that the Health Sciences Human Ethics Sub-Committee approved the following Project:

Project title: **A Space for Us - Exploring how newly arrived young women experience gender specific youth work programs.**  
Researchers: **Ms L E Scaffidi, M Rodgers, Mrs H Stewart**  
Ethics ID: **1238285**

The Project has been approved for the period: **18-Apr-2013 to 31-Dec-2013.**

It is your responsibility to ensure that all people associated with the Project are made aware of what has actually been approved.

Research projects are normally approved to 31 December of the year of approval. Projects may be renewed yearly for up to a total of five years upon receipt of a satisfactory annual report. If a project is to continue beyond five years a new application will normally need to be submitted.

Please note that the following conditions apply to your approval. Failure to abide by these conditions may result in suspension or discontinuation of approval and/or disciplinary action.

(a) **Limit of Approval:** Approval is limited strictly to the research as submitted in your Project application.

(b) **Variation to Project:** Any subsequent variations or modifications you might wish to make to the Project must be notified formally to the Human Ethics Sub-Committee for further consideration and approval. If the Sub-Committee considers that the proposed changes are significant, you may be required to submit a new application for approval of the revised Project.

(c) **Incidents or adverse affects:** Researchers must report immediately to the Sub-Committee anything which might affect the ethical acceptance of the protocol including adverse effects on participants or unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the Project. Failure to do so may result in suspension or cancellation of approval.

(d) **Monitoring:** All projects are subject to monitoring at any time by the Human Research Ethics Committee.

(e) **Annual Report:** Please be aware that the Human Research Ethics Committee requires that researchers submit an annual report on each of their projects at the end of the year, or at the conclusion of a project if it continues for less than this time. Failure to submit an annual report will mean that ethics approval will lapse.

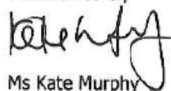
(f) **Auditing:** All projects may be subject to audit by members of the Sub-Committee.

If you have any queries on these matters, or require additional information, please contact me using the details below.

Please quote the ethics registration number and the title of the Project in any future correspondence.

On behalf of the Sub-Committee I wish you well in your research.

Yours sincerely



Ms Kate Murphy  
Manager, Human Research Ethics  
Phone: 83442073, Email: k.murphy@unimelb.edu.au

cc: HEAG Chair – Paediatrics  
Maureen Rodger

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## 11.2 Plain Language Statement

### PLAIN LANGUAGE STATEMENT

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**Project:**            **A Space for Us – Exploring how newly arrived young women experience gender specific youth work programs.**

#### Introduction

You are invited to be a part of a research project that will look at the experiences of young women who have recently arrived in Australia and how they experience young women's programs they have been a part of. Learning about young women's experiences is important so that services and programs can know what helps make life and settling into a new country easier. This work is being done as part of the student's Master's degree studies.

The researcher will talk to young women who:

- have lived in Australia for less than seven years,
- are aged 18 – 25 years of age, and
- have been a member of a program for young women.

#### What will I be asked to do?

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to come to a 1 ½ hour interview, at a time and location that's good for you. At the interview you will be asked questions about what it was like for you to move

to a new country and about being a part of a young women's program. You will be given a list of interview questions before the interview to give you more time to consider your answers. You do not have to answer any questions that make you feel uncomfortable.

With your permission, the interview will be audio-recorded so that the researcher can ensure that she has made an accurate record of what you have said. The recording will then be put in writing and you will be provided with a copy of this so that you can check that the information is correct and/or make any necessary changes

### **How will my confidentiality be protected?**

The information that you provide for this research is confidential. Your name and contact details will be kept in a separate, password-protected computer file. You will also be referred to by a pseudonym (a made up name) in any material that's published about this research. The researcher will also remove any references to personal information and not make any reference to specific programs that might allow someone to guess your identity. You should note that these measures are only able to guarantee confidentiality within the limits of the law, for example in the case of data being subpoenaed.

### **Are there any risks to me?**

The risks to you by participating in this project are minimal. As stated above there is a very small chance that you may be recognised by someone when the report is released. Careful steps, as described above, have been put in place to protect your confidentiality.

Sometimes the process of an interview can bring up thoughts and feelings that are unanticipated. The researcher will provide an opportunity for you to debrief and talk about any such feelings directly after the interview. You will also be able to contact the researcher thereafter if you wish to discuss anything in relation to your involvement in the project.

In case you need it, at the interview you will also be provided with the contact details of a counseling service close to where you live. However, if you need support or information about services sooner you can call:

The Women's Information and Referral Exchange on **1300 134 130**

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and your choice. You can withdraw from this research at any stage, and can withdraw any unprocessed data you have supplied, without prejudice. In such a case please inform the researcher on the telephone number given above. Your choice not to or to take part in this research will not impact on your relationship with any services you may be involved with.

This project has received clearance from the Melbourne University Human Research Ethics Committee. As such if you have any concerns about the conduct of this research project you can contact the:

The Manager  
Human Research Ethics  
University of Melbourne  
Ph: 8344 2073 Fax: 9347 6739

### **About the researcher**

Maureen Rodgers has been a youth worker in Victoria for the last ten years. Her work with young people has included running recreation, personal development, leadership, and alternative education programs. She has also done information, referral, case management and event management. In this time she has developed a passion for working with young people considered to be at risk, youth participation and community development. She has a BA in Community Development and a Grad. Dip in Adolescent Health and Welfare. She is currently employed as a Young Women's Project Officer at the Centre for Multicultural Youth.

**How do I agree to participate?**

If you would like to participate, please contact Maureen on 0420 363 429 or email her at [mrodgers@student.unimelb.edu.au](mailto:mrodgers@student.unimelb.edu.au) to arrange a suitable time and place for the interview. At the interview you will need to sign the accompanying consent form.

All participants will receive \$20 Westfield voucher to compensate for the cost of travel.

## 11.3 Consent Form



### FACULTY OF MEDICINE, DENTISTRY AND HEALTH SCIENCES DEPARTMENT OF PEADIATRICS

Consent form for persons participating in the following research project.

**PROJECT TITLE:** *A SPACE FOR US - Us – Exploring how newly arrived young women experience gender specific youth work programs.*

Name of participant: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of investigator(s): Maureen Rodgers (Student of Masters Adolescent Health and Welfare) \_\_\_\_\_

1. I consent to participate in this project, I understand the details of my involvement, and I have been provided with a written plain language statement to keep.
2. I understand that after I sign and return this consent form it will be retained by the researcher.
3. I understand that my participation will involve an individual interview and I agree that the researcher may use the results as described in the plain language statement.
4. I acknowledge that:
  - (a) the possible effects of participating in the interview have been explained to my satisfaction;
  - (b) I have been informed that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time without explanation or prejudice and to withdraw any unprocessed data I have provided;
  - (c) the project is for the purpose of research;
  - (d) I have been informed that the confidentiality of the information I provide will be safeguarded subject to any legal requirements;
  - (e) I have been informed that any information that makes me identifiable will be stored in a password-protected computer file.
  - (f) I have been informed that with my consent the interview will be recorded on digital audio and I understand that recording will be stored at location only available to the researcher and will be destroyed after five years;
  - (g) my name will be referred to by a pseudonym in any publications arising from the research;
  - (h) I understand that due to this research involving a small number of participants the risk of me being identified by someone is increased.
  - (j) I have been informed that a copy of the research findings will be forwarded to me, should I agree to this.

I consent to this **interview** being recorded on digital audio

☐ **yes**   ☐ **no**  
(please tick)

I wish to receive a copy of the research findings

☐ **yes**   ☐ **no**  
(please tick)

Participant signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_



## 11.4 Interview Guide

### A Space for Us – Semi Structured Interview themes and questions

**Discuss**

**Plain language statement**

**Recording the interview**

**Voucher**

**Confidentially**

Themes	Questions
<b>Demographics</b>	Age What is your country of birth? When did you come to Australia? Did you live in any other countries? How would you describe your faith or religion?
<b>Cultural Information</b>	Please tell me about your culture? How is it different to culture in Australia?  In your home country or the countries you have come from, are their youth groups like you have experienced here? Are there separate groups for boys and girls? Why?
<b>Settlement</b>	What was it like for you when you came to Australia?  What are some things that made settling here easier for you?  How did being a member of the program impact on your settlement experience?
<b>Gender</b>	Picture Card Exercise – Ask young person to choose a card that reflects what it's like to be a girl in your culture/ community.  What's it like being a girl in your family?  What are the rules for boys and girls in your culture?
<b>Gender Specific Groups</b>	Can you please tell me about the group you were involved with? When, Where, How many sessions did you attend?  How did you get involved?  What topics did you cover or learn about in your program?

	<p>Would you have got this information from somewhere else if you didn't do the group?</p> <p>How would the group have been different if boys were in the group?</p> <p>Would you have been able to discuss all the topics you did if there were boys in the group?</p> <p>How did you feel about being involved?</p> <p>What did you like the most about the program?</p> <p>What could have been improved?</p> <p>How did this program impact of your life?</p> <p>Do you think that Australian born young women benefit from these kinds of programs?</p> <p>Did your involvement in this program help you to feel more settled in Australia?</p>
<b>Religious Consideration</b>	<p>Did you feel that the youth workers respected your religious beliefs? How?</p>
<b>Family</b>	<p>Did you need someone's permission to join the group?</p> <p>Would you have been allowed to join if the group was for both boys and girls?</p> <p>What did your family think of you being involved?</p> <p>Did the staff member meet or speak to your family?</p>
<b>Conclusion</b>	<p>How do you think newly arrived young people experience women's programs?</p> <p>Is there anything else you would like to say?</p>

After the interview

#### **Debrief**

How are you feeling?

What did you think of the questions that you were asked?

Did anything happen in this interview that surprised you?

Offer to give the young woman a copy of the transcript to check.

Ask the young woman if she would like a copy of a summary of the final report?